



[Ecclesiastes 7:1-4](#)

- (1) A good name *is* better than precious ointment,
And the day of death than the day of one's birth;
(2) Better to go to the house of mourning
Than to go to the house of feasting,
For that *is* the end of all men;
And the living will take *it* to heart.
(3) Sorrow *is* better than laughter,
For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.
(4) The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning,
But the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth.

New King James Version

By asking [God](#) for help regarding its reality, [Moses](#) makes a vital statement about preparing for death: “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” ([Psalm 90:12](#)). The phrase, “number our days,” suggests that we put our use of time in order. Death and its reality play an important role in Christian life, for God fully intends that it have an overall positive effect on the lives of His children. Everybody dies. It cannot be avoided, but not everybody prepares for death.

Martin Luther also made an insightful observation on preparing for death: “It is good for us to invite death into our presence when it is still at a distance and not on the move.” The time to learn about rock climbing is not when hanging from the edge of a precipice but well before starting up the side of the cliff. It seems, though, that many do most things on the spur of the moment, a practice that is not good, especially concerning something like death that absolutely no one escapes.

God gives some insight and counsel in [Ecclesiastes 7:3-4](#). Death, He says, is good for the heart. The heart beats at our core. Attending one good funeral can shape a person's worldview more positively than a whole year's worth of parties. Verse 3 may be better understood if translated as, “By sadness, the heart is made better.” His point is aimed at the soundness of the heart, which results from the honest thoughtfulness that sorrow causes a person to engage in. God is saying that sorrow tends to make us better people.

A specific and important sorrow is one Paul names in [II Corinthians 7:8-11](#). In this brief passage, he uses “sorry,” “sorrow,” or “sorrowed” seven times. Why is it important? Because godly sorrow produces [repentance](#), a change of mind and conduct.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon is clearly implying that, because we [love](#) to laugh, worldly mirth is attractive on the surface and momentarily focuses our attention. However, in terms of conduct, it frequently leaves an individual essentially unchanged. When this is combined with the godly truths of [II Corinthians 7:8-11](#), it becomes clear that, by God's design, the discipline of sorrow tends to lead to improvement of conduct. Thus, God Himself sometimes afflicts us to produce sorrow in the hope that the pains and their accompanying sorrow make our hearts tender so that we change.

The result of a parent disciplining a child in a timely manner and in appropriate measure is a good illustration. Is not some measure of pain and its accompanying sorrow inflicted? Proverbs frequently tells us to spank our children. Why? Is not it to produce the sorrow of separation from one who is loved to accomplish a change in attitude and behavior?

God is saying through Solomon, then, that sorrow—in a morally and ethically beneficial way in which laughter cannot—penetrates and influences the heart, the very center of our being and from which conduct flows. So important is godly sorrow that [II Corinthians 7:10](#) states, “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of [the world](#) produces death.”

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[Ecclesiastes and Christian Living \(Part Eight\): Death](#)

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